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FM THE SITUATION ROOM//TOSCO 38//

TO GENERAL SCOWCROFT

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TOSCO 38

THE PEKING CANDIDATE

OBSERVER
BY RUSSELL BAKER

THE MIRACLE OF NETWORK TELEVISION TAKES YOU NOW TO ANCIENT CHINA WHERE OUR WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT, BUCKY SHORES, IS STANDING OFF THE ANCIENT GREAT WALL WAITING FOR THE ANCIENT TEA CEREMONY TO BEGIN. WE HAVE AN EXCELLENT PICTURE OF YOU AND THE ANCIENT GREAT WALL, BUCKY. HOW IS EVERYTHING IN CHINA?

"IT IS EXTREMELY ANCIENT, CASPER."

CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE ANCIENT TEA CEREMONY, BUCKY?

"INDEED I CAN. THE ANCIENT TEA CEREMONY IS JAPANESE AND, OF COURSE, IT IS NEVER PERFORMED IN CHINA, AND WILL NOT BE PERFORMED TODAY."

THEN PERHAPS YOU'LL TELL US, BUCKY SHORES, JUST WHAT IT IS THAT YOU ARE AWAITING ON THE ANCIENT GREAT WALL.

"ACTUALLY, CASPER, THIS IS NOT THE ANCIENT GREAT WALL. THIS IS A BRAND NEW GREAT WALL CONSTRUCTED BY THE CHINESE HERE IN PEKING LAST NIGHT TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR ANCIENT PROFICIENCY IN WALL CONSTRUCTION. THIS ENTIRE WALL, EXTENDING FOR MORE THAN 700 MILES, WAS CONSTRUCTED BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND 6 O'CLOCK THIS MORNING BY 800,000 LABORERS USING NOTHING MORE THAN STONES, MORTAR AND CRUDE, HAND-MADE BROOMS."

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THAT WILL CERTAINLY GIVE THE SOVIET UNION PLENTY TO THINK ABOUT. WHAT IS THE PRESIDENT DOING, BUCKY?

"THE PRESIDENT IS NOW CLOSETED WITH HENRY KISSINGER DISCUSSING PLANS TO BUY SOUVENIRS FOR HIS FAMILY, AND PEKING IS RIFE WITH RUMOR OF AN IMPENDING SECRET FLIGHT TO SHANGHAI."

THE PURPOSE OF THAT, I SUPPOSE, WOULD BE A SECRET MEETING WITH THE ANCIENT MAO TSE-TUNG.

"NO. THE PURPOSE WOULD BE TO BUY SOUVENIRS. THE HUGE AMERICAN PRESS CONTINGENT, WHICH THE PRESIDENT ACCOMPANIED ON THIS TRIP, HAD CLEANED OUT ALL THE PEKING SOUVENIR SHOPS BEFORE AIR FORCE ONE ARRIVED, UNLESS THE PRESIDENT GETS TO SHANGHAI BEFORE THE AMERICAN PRESS, SOURCES CLOSE TO KISSINGER BELIEVE, THE SOUVENIR SHOPS WILL BE DEPLETED."

IS ANYONE IN THE AMERICAN DELEGATION TALKING FOR THE RECORD ABOUT THIS SOUVENIR CRISIS, BUCKY?

"A NUMBER OF THE REPORTERS, CASPER, ARE BITTERLY OUT SPOKEN ABOUT THE CHINESE FAILURE TO SUPPLY NEW SOUVENIRS DIFFERENT FROM THE STUFF THE REPORTERS BOUGHT WHEN THEY WERE HERE WITH PRESIDENT NIXON IN 1972. THEY ARE FED UP WITH THE SAME OLD MAO CAPS, BLUE QUILTED JACKETS AND CHOPSTICKS. THERE IS TALK OF A PRESS WALKOUT."

HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS THREAT?

"I SHUDDER AT THE PROSPECT, CASPER. THE PRESIDENT HAS NOTHING TO DO IN CHINA EXCEPT BE REPORTED AND PHOTOGRAPHED. IF REPORTERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS AND TELEVISION WALK OUT, HE WILL HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO FOLLOW THEM."

WHERE WOULD THE PRESS GO IF THEY LEFT CHINA, BUCKY?

"WE ARE SPLIT RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE, CASPER. A LARGE FACTION FAVORS GOING TO DISNEYLAND--"

A REMARKABLE VARIETY OF MICKEY MOUSE SOUVENIRS THERE, ALL RIGHT--

"--BUT ANOTHER GROUP WANTS TO GO TO THE MIDDLE EAST TO BUY BURNOOSES AND CAMEL SADDLES."

I ASSUME THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO FOLLOW WHICHEVER ROUTE THE PRESS TAKES.

"THERE IS NO OTHER WAY HE CAN GET THE PUBLICITY HE NEEDS TO BOLSTER HIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN, CASPER. THERE'S NO POINT IN



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HIS SITTING HERE AND DOING THE CHOPSTICKS-AT-THE-BANQUET
BIT IF THERE'S NOBODY AROUND TO REPORT IT."

I GUESS WHAT WE'RE REALLY TALKING ABOUT IS THE POWER
OF THE PRESS.

"WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT, CASPER, IS SOUVENIRS. WHAT'S THE
POINT OF COMING ALL THE WAY OUT HERE AND GOING THROUGH THIS
ANCIENT CHINA ACT AGAIN IF YOU CAN'T EVEN FIND A DECENT SOUVENIR
TO TAKE BACK TO WASHINGTON? THE CHINESE COULD AT LEAST HAVE
LAID ON SOME YAK SADDLES IF THEY WANTED TO GET FORD ELECTED."

BUCKY SHORES, PUTTING ASIDE FOR THE MOMENT YOUR OUTRAGED SENSE
OF PERSONAL DISAPPOINTMENT--

"I WANT A CAMEL SADDLE TO GIVE MY WIFE FOR CHRISTMAS."

I SAY, PUTTING ASIDE YOUR OWN SENSE OF DISAPPOINTMENT, IS THERE
ANY WAY THE TRIP CAN BE SALVAGED? SUPPOSE SECRETARY KISSINGER
NEGOTIATED WITH THE CHINESE LEADERS TO HAVE SOME NEW
SOUVENIRS FLOWN IN FROM AFRICA?

"OUT OF THE QUESTION, CASPER, NOBODY CAN FIND OUT WHO THE CHINESE
LEADERS ARE. IF THE AMERICANS KNEW WHO WAS IN CHARGE, THEY
MIGHT TRANSACT SOME DIPLOMATIC BUSINESS, BUT THEY DON'T, SO THERE'S
NOTHING TO REPORT, AND SINCE THERE IS NOTHING TO REPORT AND
NO NEW SOUVENIRS TO BUY, THERE IS NO REASON FOR THE PRESS
TO STAY ON."

THANK YOU, BUCKY SHORES--

"I DON'T THINK A CAMEL SADDLE IS TOO MUCH TO EXPECT--"

--FOR THAT BRILLIANT ANALYSIS OF THIS DESPERATE CRISIS WHICH
HAS BLOWN UP SO UNEXPECTEDLY--

"--EVEN A SET OF MICKEY MOUSE PANTS FOR THE KIDS, THE KIND
WITH THE BIG BUTTONS AND SUSPENDERS--"

--IN ANCIENT CHINA, CRADLE OF THE WORLD'S MOST ANCIENT CIVILIZATION.

"--EVEN A YAK SADDLE--"
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